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NEWSLETTER

Greetings from Signs of God - welcome to our 2019 autumn edition

Signs of God

*British Sign Language in Christian Settings
Training and Exploration*

Greetings from the Chair



Leaves are now falling off the trees and as you read this, autumn will be here!! The Trustees hope you enjoy the news in this edition of the Newsletter, focussing on the great work that has happened throughout the summer. Once again a big thank you to those in the core team who have continued to help this essential work to benefit so many people! I especially would like to thank the Christian Interpreter Network interpreters who volunteered over the summer at various events. This more than compensated for the loss of a 'dear friend' - our famous 'green Signs of God tent', which was badly torn by the wind and had to be sadly binned!! Thanks CIN team!

We have exciting events coming up so make sure you book yourself for these in order that you and your work amongst Deaf people can benefit from you and all that you will learn.

God is eternally unchanging and faithful; no matter the season, no matter the circumstances. "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever" (Psalm 107:1) Thank you all. ***Sarah Tupling - Chair of Trustees***

In a nutshell:

Our workshops are ever popular and in 2019, over 100 participants have attended workshops we delivered in Hertfordshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire with one more planned for November in Derbyshire.

Upcoming events:

- CIN Volunteer Day - An away day, 30 November 2019 in Leicester for all our CIN volunteers.
- Derbyshire workshop: Sat 16 November 2019, more information below.
- Summer School 2020 - our renowned week long residential workshop at a new venue. Keep reading to find out where and how to book. 

Core Team member, Trustee.... what does it all mean?

You might be seeing the term 'Core Team member' and thinking "what do they do?"

Signs of God is a registered charity so follows a charity model structure. We have members who commit to actively contribute to the charity in various ways - leading sessions at our workshops, interpreting at meetings, taking part in consultations, administration, developing training are just a few of the ways they contribute. The Core Team are the members and are nominated to become part of the 'Core Team' at an AGM; some volunteer to take specific roles within the charity, and are responsible for specific areas of the work.

Trustees are elected from the Core Team for a period of 3 years. There must be at least 3 Trustees at any time and the Trustee Board must have a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer elected. Signs of God has always had a Chair who is Deaf. The Trustees meet 3-4 times a year to discuss the legal and strategic aspects of the charity. The Trustees are legally accountable for the charity, ensure that all the activities are productive, use the charity funds effectively, and make sure the charity follows the law and our constitution. Ta da! 🙌

Feedback

We'd like to hear from you. What would you like from us?

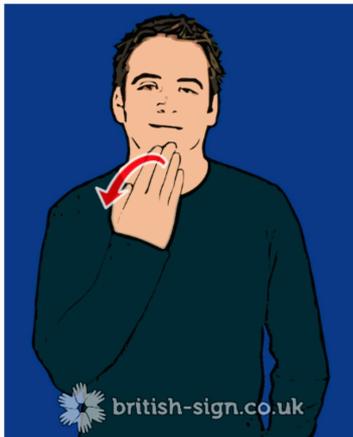
Signs of God aims to advance the use of British Sign Language in Christian settings and to promote and enable full participation in the Christian faith of people who use British Sign Language. Please let us know your requests and suggestions on how we can achieve this in your area by emailing:

info@signsofgod.org.uk

If you've attended one of our workshops recently, thank you. At the end of each event, we ask for feedback. If you have any further comments or compliments, please let us know. Many times people say nothing happens in their area. This can be easily rectified as we are happy to come to you, we'd love to see you. To request or discuss a workshop for your area please email:

workshops@signsofgod.org.uk 🙌

Christian Interpreters' Network - Volunteers' Away Day



THANKS

Flat hand starts with fingertips on chin. Hand moves down and away from signer.

To those of you on the Christian Interpreters' Network thank you for being willing to respond to the many and various requests coming out. We thank God for your commitment and service in this way which is so valuable; we pray He blesses you through it.

You should have received an email to let you know the Trustees are arranging a Volunteers' Away Day as a small "Thank You" for all you have and are doing. It will take place *on Saturday 30th November from 10am till 4pm* at All Nations Community Centre, 12 Frog Island, Leicester LE3 5AG. This day will be for anyone who in the past *two* years has either:

- been on team (including but not limited to Spring Harvest, ECG, New Wine, Greenbelt, ONE, Soul Survivor)
- responded to any of the other one-off events/requests that have been advertised via CIN for short Christian events
- for people who would have liked to respond but haven't felt able to.

To book, please visit <https://www.signsofgod.org.uk/events/62#booknow> 🙌

Ways to support

Signs of God is staffed entirely by volunteers, and we couldn't do what we do without you. If you would like to support us by volunteering at events but are unable, please consider making a regular financial donation to Signs of God if you can. Any amount, big or small is invaluable and would go a long way towards enabling our work.

Perhaps you or your church/organisation could prayerfully consider partnering with us by making a regular monthly donation or a one-off contribution to our Bursary Scheme, which enables individuals experiencing financial hardship to attend our residential workshops. Please email treasurer@signsofgod.org.uk for details on how to donate. Thank you so much. 🙌



BSL Zone at Greenbelt 2019

Greenbelt Festival - Review by Gill Behenna, on-site BSL Team Leader

Beautiful blue skies and scorching heat are not things that usually accompany August Bank Holiday weekends in England! However, this year’s Greenbelt Festival enjoyed amazing weather – even too hot for comfort! Welly boots stayed at home and the queues at the ice cream stalls were very long!

Seven interpreters staffed the Deaf Greenbelt team (in a hastily improvised team tent and BSL zone – see below for the demise of our Signs of God tent at New Wine!) and between us we interpreted approximately fifty seminars and performances over the four days of the festival. Interpreting at Greenbelt is challenging because the team responds to requests from Deaf participants so we often don’t know what we will be interpreting until we get to the festival.

This year we interpreted a Communion service that was Christmas themed (with real camels!) poetry, comedy, politics, and music. We also ran a beginners’ BSL workshop where we learnt to sign the Christmas story (of course) and signs for our favourite drinks – why? Well because when all was over for the day, we popped into “The Jesus Arms” for a pint expertly pulled by our very own Deaf bar staff member, Penny Beschizza! 🙌



Greenbelt Festival - Deaf Volunteer Perspective

Trustee Penny Beschizza was a Greenbelt volunteer for her first time - as a Deaf bartender in the festival's own Beer Tent, The Jesus Arms! The tops of the bar, littered with fingerspelling alphabets and Beer/Cider Lists, reverberated from next door due to Glade Big Top's groovy music!

Penny quickly demonstrated skills pulling pints and taking orders; she taught several customers the signs for pint, half-pint, Crazy Goat, Pigin' Saint, Rhubarb Cider, Jonah Ale, Bellowhead, Beijing Black, and more - including "God bless you". Everyone who encountered a Deaf and signing bartender were rewarded with signs and smiles!

Seven hour shifts every day, mastering the fast clanging of cash tills (all glasses were paid for or returned & refunded with £2 deposit each), waving handheld card machines in the air when the WiFi signal weakened!

Having BSL and Deaf-friendly communication at the bar was a roaring success and the Beer Tent team were overjoyed that Penny plans to return to them next year, in 2020. The picture of the pub sign says it all! Signname is "Jesus 'strong' Arms with both fists with thumbs up". 🙌

New Wine United 2019 by Gill Behenna, on-site BSL Team Leader

As usual, Signs of God provided interpreting teams for New Wine United. After over 20 years of going to the Bath & West Showground near Shepton Mallet Somerset, we had to learn our way around the new site at the East of England Showground near Peterborough. The site was good, and the Deaf camping was very close to most of the action – no complaints from us!

United week 1 had a team of eight interpreters, and United week 2 a team of ten interpreters. We were delighted to be able to include a Deaf person in the team, Mary-Jayne Russell de Clifford who signed the worship songs and also took part in the BSL seminar stream. A highlight of both weeks was seeing 5,000 people joining in signing the song 'This is Love (Thank You for the Cross)' led by Paul Pryce-Jones in Week 1 and Mary-Jayne in week 2.

BSL Zone – for both weeks we set up the Signs of God tent to create a meeting space for eating and socialising for both team members and Deaf people. During the first week it was damaged by the pouring rain and was expertly “repaired” with gaffa tape! We had hoped to nurse it through to the end of Greenbelt but it was not to be! Sadly, the high winds at the end of week 2 finished it off with a huge rip across the middle as we took it down. We sent it to the rubbish with grateful thanks for the six years it had served us well.

BSL Stream – week 2 saw four seminars arranged by Signs of God with Deaf delegates. In the end, we were only able to give three of them bad weather meant the event finished early. Forty or so people came each day to learn BSL, enjoy Bible teaching, and worship all in BSL. Thanks to Janice Silo, Sara Head, and Bob Shrine for contributing to the BSL Stream.

Looking to 2020...

We will be sending out invitations early in the New Year to join the interpreting teams next year. Keep an eye on your emails if you would like to be part of the adventure! 🙌

New Wine United 2019 - Deaf Translator perspective by Mary-Jayne Russell de Clifford



“This is like Heaven”, said Sara Head with a fulfilled grin. This was when I was on stage with the New Wine band signing ‘This is Love (Thank you for the Cross)’ written by Chris Sayburn. 5,000 people were signing the chorus and we were all ‘speaking’ with our hands in the same language. It was phenomenal. Chris Sayburn gave me a heartfelt thankful hug. I felt the thankfulness from God. Gill Behenna (Sign Language Team Leader) was overjoyed to see the access occurring on

stage equally with the band. I had indescribable feelings at that moment due to the blessings from Jesus.

This was my first experience as a Deaf Translator at a Christian festival and it felt epic. God has slowly guided me to become a Deaf Translator this year. My first taster experience was at Cherish (a women’s Christian conference) where I only signed a few of the worship songs. Next was at my church, which established a Unity Service once a month where I translate the worship songs with the hearing band.

New Wine was a breakthrough experience for me where I discovered my gifts, talent and true calling from Jesus for BSL worship. The songs were revealed a couple of hours before the service started. Such a challenge involved quickly going to the Team Lounge, grabbing WiFi and practising the songs in BSL and teaching the lovely Level 6 signers too. It was a privilege working with them and we became a close team. Whilst on stage - we supported each other by translating and signing to each other and encouraging each other too. After the epic experience in the Arena every evening, I would go to the Presence Tent to sing, sign and be still in His presence!

The community we created on site was an inspiration and we became a family of Christ including all of the Deaf delegates. I want to thank Gill, Anna and the interpreting team for the amazing opportunity, support and experience which I will always carry with me. I’ll be back next year, that’s how much I love it (and my son will be back too!)

Anything is possible with God, to touch people’s hearts, to learn BSL and give our whole selves to Christ in BSL as we sign, sing and pray. 🙌

Greenbelt 2019 - access review

Signs of God make Greenbelt possible for me and other Deaf festival-goers. Thanks to their team of volunteers, trained BSL-English interpreters, Deaf 'Greenbelters' can attend any of the plethora of talks, performances, and workshops offered at the festival. While most people take for granted being able to choose any events they wish to attend, this kind of access is the stuff of dreams for a Deaf person.



The impact that Signs of God has on the festival doesn't stop at access alone. The "Deaf Tent" they provide in the camping area is a meeting place, BSL space, and a haven of hospitality. And, of course, it is where the work of "Interpreter Tetris" aka scheduling happens and they manage to cover allllll (or at least most) of the requests we make. Even the midnight prayers way out in the Grove! Also, thanks to the visibility of interpreters and Deaf participants at Greenbelt over the years, there's a high level of "Deaf friendliness" at the festival. At Greenbelt I've met more than the average number of hearing people who sign, even a little, and those who don't are unusually approachable. I reckon just seeing BSL around so much raises awareness and lessens the shock of encountering a real, live Deaf person.

I never would have attended Greenbelt without Signs of God, and here I am with four festivals under my belt (!) since my first time in 2014. I moved to the Netherlands last year, so for the past two Greenbelts I've travelled internationally to attend. Greenbelt bills itself as "a place to believe in", and for me it's a place to come home to. Thank you, Signs of God!

By Tashi Bradford 



Greenbelt 2019 had the theme of "Wit and Wisdom". It was a full programme of talks/discussions on various Christian topics, current affairs, comedy shows and for those that were interested, lots of music.

I have been going to the Greenbelt Festival for about 10 years and was fully hearing at the beginning but, over the last 5/6 years my hearing has steadily worsened and I now cannot process spoken words at all. This meant I was a bit apprehensive about being out and about on my own; what would happen when I wanted to order food, get a drink or ask a steward for information and that's before I start going to the talks! I was worrying over nothing. The food vendors, bar staff and the stewards were all amazing; as soon as I told them I was Deaf they immediately made eye contact and ensured I could see to lip read them and if I still struggled they found other ways to communicate.

The icing on the cake for me came from the incredible team of Signs of God interpreters who asked me for a list of the talks I wanted to attend and interpreted everything I had requested. Wow, they are very special people and I thank them and the other Greenbelt volunteers from the bottom of my heart for enabling me to have such a fantastic experience. I would encourage anyone reading this who has never been to Greenbelt to give it a try. By Jan Munns 

ONE Event - access review by Heather Peachey

Once again we fielded a good team of four for this annual event, not an easy one to staff as it clashes with Greenbelt. This year we had weather more suited to lounging poolside than working and enjoyed our meals al fresco. It did get rather 'over-warm' and more than a few guests were to be seen sitting on the grass in shady spots outside the Big Top - quite a contrast from the years when wind and rain have been in plentiful supply.

New Life Lincoln, part of the GroundLevel network of churches are the organisers and I think they are among the most welcoming and supportive people I have come across and we are invited to be involved in planning meetings. We also have been able to request a specific camping area which works well for us. Those who don't wish to camp can choose b&b accommodation in Bishop Grosseteste University, just a very short drive away.

The venue itself is very pleasant, being a well-drained flat site with good facilities. Cars are permitted to stay beside your tent/caravan and you can easily come and go as you wish. The city of Lincoln is a few minutes away, and that weekend it also hosts a steam punk festival which provides additional interest and colour if you have an afternoon off.

Prep is sought for us and we are welcomed into the Senior Leaders' lounge, aka "The Green Room" to meet with any speaker. We feel truly welcome. Thank you so much to the team who worked together brilliantly. 

Signs of God AGM 2019 by Judith Hillary, Secretary to the Trustees

The words Annual General Meeting are often followed with a big sigh. Not so with Signs of God; the day delivered a good balance of praise, thanksgiving, reviewing, discussing, reporting, brainstorming, sharing, fellowship, prayer, and laughter. The morning was a time of looking back over previous set goals and achievements but not before a fun interactive demonstration of how Signs of God as an organisation has grown. It does make you wonder how one person managed all those jobs, hats off to Gill Behenna. We thank God for the many volunteers taking on these various tasks and new roles as the organisation grows.



Five new members were welcomed to the Core Team as well as a new Trustee being appointed, which is wonderful and prepares for future growth. Core Team members are spread out across the country from as far north as Morayshire to the southern part of Cornwall. We have seen amazing growth over the years; see photo below.

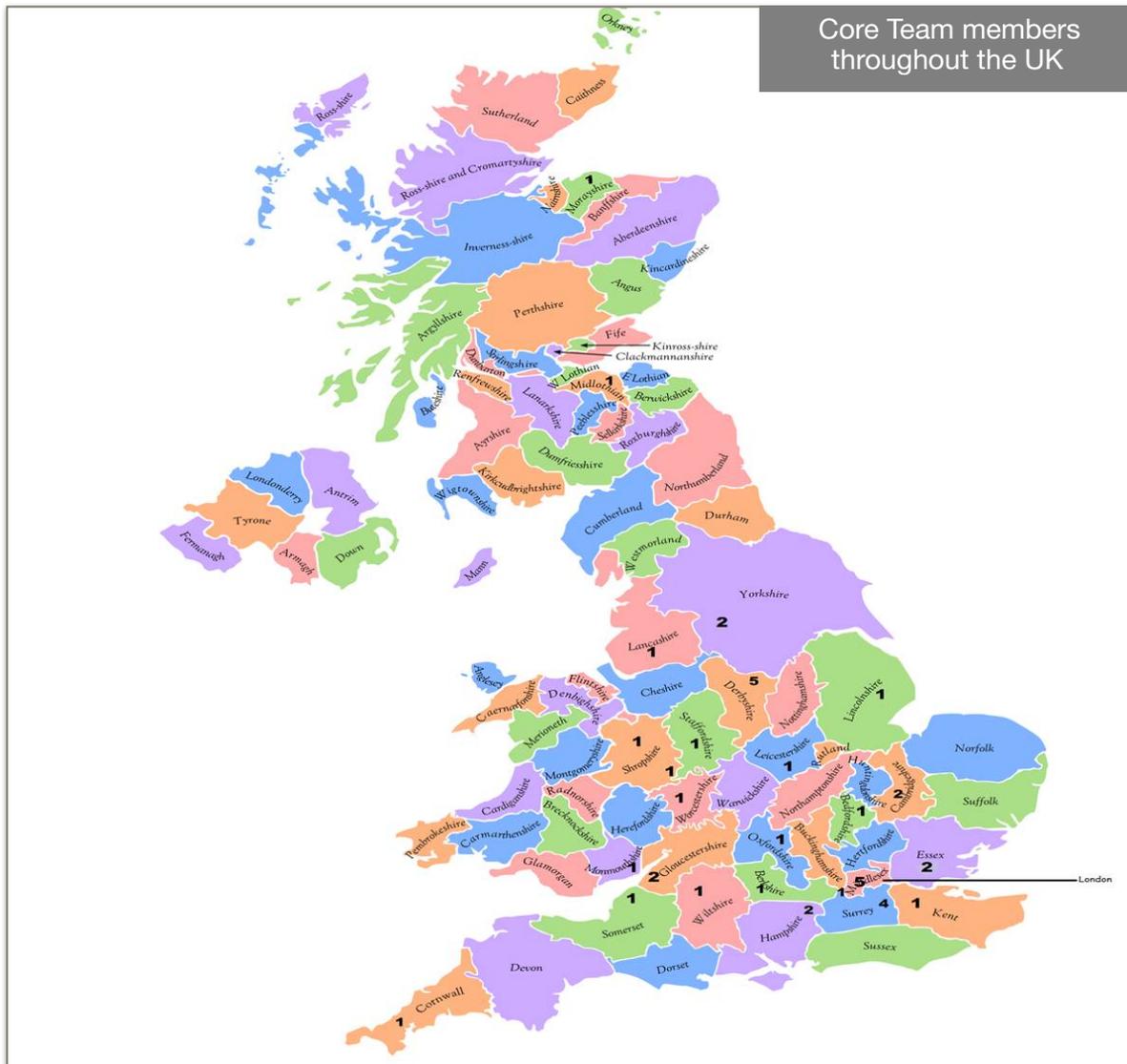
After a tasty lunch and time to catch up with each other, we joined together in song to wish our Chair, Sarah Tupling a very happy birthday. The candle on the cake was a surprise to the fire safety marshal but thankfully, he granted approval.



In the afternoon we looked to the future and shared ideas that God put on individuals' hearts. This was followed by a time of prayer for the work and people within Signs of God; having focused prayer stations was a great way to share and pray together. It was a long day but from a personal point of view I feel that being there to hear from and share with each other really brought it home that we are part of a far bigger picture. I end with the Bible reading Janice Silo (trustee) read that day:

“Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:4-7 (NLT) 





Summer School

17th - 23rd August 2020

The Hayes Conference Centre, Hayes Lane, Swanwick, Alfreton, Derbyshire DE55 1AU

That's right, it's happening next year and we are so excited. We would love to see you at our new venue in Derbyshire, a well known dedicated Christian conference centre so it's sure to be a blessed time. Just £665, the week is open to anyone, deaf or hearing, with Level 1 BSL equivalent and above.

The cost includes full board, en-suite accommodation and a packed programme of learning. Our team includes experienced Deaf BSL teachers and interpreter trainers. We'll also have opportunity to learn more about the Church, theology, the Bible, Deaf culture and BSL from a range of visiting speakers.

Trainee or qualified interpreters can join our intern interpreting scheme operating during the week. See a glimpse of 2016's event here <https://youtu.be/Qot3INsn2RI>

We have early bird spaces available at a price of just £615 for the first 20 people to book and pay in full by the end of December 2019, however, be quick if you want to take advantage of that offer as there are only a few spaces left at this discounted price.

To book and pay your deposit by PayPal, visit <https://www.signsofgod.org.uk/events/64#booknow> or email us at summerschool@signsofgod.org.uk if you would like to pay your deposit by cheque or bank transfer.

Bursary Scheme

Would you like to attend Summer School but your current financial circumstances may be causing you hardship? The Bursary Scheme is available for people who are unable to book due to financial difficulties. The Trustees are happy to announce they have contributed £665 to the bursary from general charity funds to boost the generous donations from our supporters.

Further information on how to apply is available here:

<https://www.signsofgod.org.uk/eventresources/513/download>

The BSL video version can be seen here <https://youtu.be/3Q1YjjC13iY>

The deadline for applications is 24 November 2019 

The origin of Deaf Space workshops by Janice Silo, Trustee



The idea of looking at worship, theology, and the Bible through different lenses is nothing new, but the idea of looking at these things through “Deaf Eyes” is still relatively new. So, for some Deaf Christians, it was life changing as they realised that their ideas were valid - the start of an exciting adventure with God - ideas about God and faith didn't have to come from hearing people, they could be truly Deaf!

“Through Deaf Eyes” really started at a Deaf Anglicans Together (DAT) weekend conference a few years ago. Carolyn Denmark and myself were 2 of the 3 Deaf guest speakers who

were teamed up for a workshop on Deaf worship. Many of the participants had BSL as their first language. It was a successful session and Deaf Christians became engaged, asked multiple questions, and realised we really were created in His image (we were not a damaged image of God) and it was okay to look at all aspects of worship through Deaf Eyes. Judith Jackson also shared this vision. Before we knew it, the idea of “Deaf Space” workshops was born and Sarah Tupling brought her own insight and skills into the team.

Our first workshop was in Bristol and focused on worship. Our second was in Leicester on the Bible and was so successful, that we repeated it in Stone, Staffordshire. Some participants have felt that the Bible was not for Deaf people because of the emphasis on voice, sound and so on. But when they started to visualise Bible verses in BSL and realised God loves us as we are, they could truly know God's grace and His love for us.

We have had 3 Deaf Space workshops so far and there is certainly a demand for them. Signs of God has supported Deaf Space financially because the trustees have accepted that small audiences are more beneficial for Deaf Christians and give us more time to explain and share the Bible through Deaf Eyes in a Deaf Way. The workshops have also been useful in introducing Signs of God to Deaf participants who had always assumed that Signs of God was just for hearing people, or only open to members, or was only for Church of England people.



Many thanks to all of you who have prayed for us and supported us. Thanks be to God, the adventure continues! 



One day workshop in Derbyshire

Please join us in Derbyshire for a day exploring how to use BSL in a Christian setting. Ever wondered how to sign parts of the Bible or worship songs? Here's a great opportunity to learn more on **Sat 16 November 2019**. Location: St Nick's Allestree, 2 Lawn Avenue, Allestree, Derby DE22 2PE. Cost: £20. Refreshments

provided, please bring your own lunch. Parking available on site. For more information and to book your place, please click <https://www.signsofgod.org.uk/events/65> 🙌



Deaf Space workshop review by Dawn Lynch

Deaf Space Workshop on 21st September was very interesting and informative. There were five presenters who taught us and they all used different methods to deliver their information.

What I enjoyed the most was the picture of four different sized fish that Janice used when teaching us. Such a visual and clear accessible way for us to understand what Janice taught us. I particularly

enjoyed the workshop because we accessed the Bible through Deaf eyes to understand and visualised it by using sign language.

It was an excellent and insightful learning curve. We also did a work group discussion CANA (clear, accurate, natural, accessible) after watching video clips. Carolyn Denmark showed a video of the late Jerry Hanifin.

I would like to congratulate the team for the excellent workshop and hope to attend another Deaf Space workshop again very soon. To Sarah, Janice, Gill, Carolyn and Clark, a big thank you. 🙌



Our contact details

Signs of God is staffed entirely by volunteers, please be patient if you contact us and there is a delay receiving a response.

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